

**JJ Hensley**

[The Arizona Republic](#)

They served their country - and ended up on the streets.

It's the reality for thousands of former servicemen and -women in Arizona, where the population of homeless veterans has held steady for the past five years even as it decreased by more than 30 percent nationally.

For men like Chad Scheytt, an event occurring this weekend at the state fairgrounds offers hope.

Scheytt was among more than 1,000 people who showed up at Veterans Memorial Coliseum on Friday for the ninth annual Arizona StandDown, an event that attempts to connect homeless veterans with services that can help them turn their lives around.

It's impossible to come up with the precise number of homeless veterans, but the best attempts have put the number nationally at 131,000, down from about 200,000 five years ago. But while the population has declined nationally, the number in Arizona remains at an estimated 8,000, 3,500 of them in Maricopa County.

There are 192 permanent-housing beds in Maricopa County committed to homeless veterans.

The weekend-long event at the fairgrounds brings together more than 700 volunteers offering the veterans a variety of services, including medical and dental care, legal counseling, and job and housing opportunities.

"I was impressed by the array of services, but I was disturbed by the enormity of the problem," said U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Ariz., who attended Friday. "It's simply unacceptable to leave them on the streets."

Scheytt, a 38-year-old Navy veteran, is staying in a shelter. He moved to Arizona from California recently for a new start and came to the fairgrounds for clothes, food stamps, legal help and dental work.

"It's been tough for me to get situated," said Scheytt, who left the service in 1992. He said he is bipolar and schizophrenic and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

"The problem is readjusting from [military](#) life to civilian life," he said. "I don't think they focus on that enough when you're in the military."

But the military is beginning to focus on the problem of homeless veterans.

Gov. Jan Brewer, who attended the event with politicians including Arizona Attorney General Terry Goddard and Phoenix City Councilmen Michael Nowakowski and Claude Mattox, noted the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' five-year plan to end homelessness among veterans and the agency's financial commitment to programs to alleviate homelessness.

It's up to Col. Joey Strickland, director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, to make sure those funds reach agencies that can help veterans. His group is working with local shelters to add hundreds of more beds dedicated to homeless veterans.

Those efforts include applying for grants to distribute to area non-profit groups, donating \$275,000 to US Vets to provide an additional 75 beds at Central Arizona Shelter Services, and working with the Madison Street Veterans Association to renovate rooms at other shelters.

Joaquin Muniz, 32, was on the verge of joining the ranks of homeless veterans last year.

The former Marine had come to Arizona from Oregon and was staying in his car when he learned from the VA about the StandDown. He said he came to the event to relax but ended up getting a driver's license, a home and a job out of last year's three-day affair.

"It can change their lives," said Muniz, who now works at the Social Security Administration in downtown Phoenix. "It helps, it works, if they have the faith and use the resources."

Strickland said there are many other veterans out there just like Muniz.

"These are military veterans. They're not your average homeless person. They tend to have some discipline and structure in their lives," Strickland said. "Like a lot of people, they've fallen on hard times. If we can bring them off the streets and get them help, they can be productive members of our state."